



PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Exercises After Your Neck Surgery

This information will teach you how to do neck and shoulder exercises after your neck surgery.

After your surgery, your neck and shoulder on the side of your surgery (involved side) may feel tight and weak. The exercises in this resource will help make your neck and shoulder muscles stronger and more flexible. This will help you regain your shoulder and neck function.

Start these exercises when your doctor or nurse tells you that your incision (surgical cut) has healed well. Beginning the exercises when instructed is the key to a successful recovery. It may also affect how well your shoulder and neck will function in the future.

Suggestions for Daily Life

- Always keep your shoulders back and relaxed and your head retracted (pulled back) for good posture. This prevents you from developing tightness in your chest muscles and straining your neck and shoulder muscles.
- If you have weakness on your involved side, support your arm on a table or armrest when sitting. While upright, rest your involved hand on your hip or in your pocket to ease the weight of that arm on your shoulder. This helps prevent pulling on the muscles and other parts of your neck and shoulder.
- Lie on your back as much as possible when sleeping. If you must lie on your uninvolved side, rest the arm of your involved side on a pillow in front of you to prevent pulling at your shoulder. Avoid lying on your involved side unless your nurse or doctor says it's okay.
- Do not lift or carry anything heavier than 3 pounds (1.4 kilograms) on your involved side until you can do so without discomfort. For your reference, a steam iron weighs around 3 pounds while a half gallon of milk is 4 pounds. Speak with your doctor or nurse before lifting or carrying things over 3 pounds.
- Avoid carrying a heavy shoulder bag or purse on your involved side. Check with your doctor or nurse before you try to carry a backpack or knapsack.

Exercise Tips

- Do the exercises at least 2 times a day for 3 months. If you regain full use of your shoulder and full motion of your neck before 3 months, ask your doctor if you can stop the exercises. If you have not regained full use of your neck or shoulder after 3 months, tell your doctor.
- Breathe normally and do not hold your breath during the exercises.
- Do the exercises slowly and smoothly. Avoid fast or “jerky” movements.
- You may want to check your movements in a mirror to make sure that you have good posture.
- If you experience pain or swelling in your face, neck, or shoulder and it prevents you from doing your usual activities or exercises, tell your doctor or nurse. They may want you to see a physical therapist.

Exercises

Turning neck stretch

1. Gently turn your head so you are looking up to the right.
2. Place your right hand on your left cheek and jaw. Apply mild pressure to give yourself a deeper stretch (see Figure 1).
3. Turn your head back to look down and to your left.
4. Place your left hand on top of your head and gently apply pressure (see Figure 1).
5. Repeat this 10 times. Then repeat this movement in the other direction 10 times.

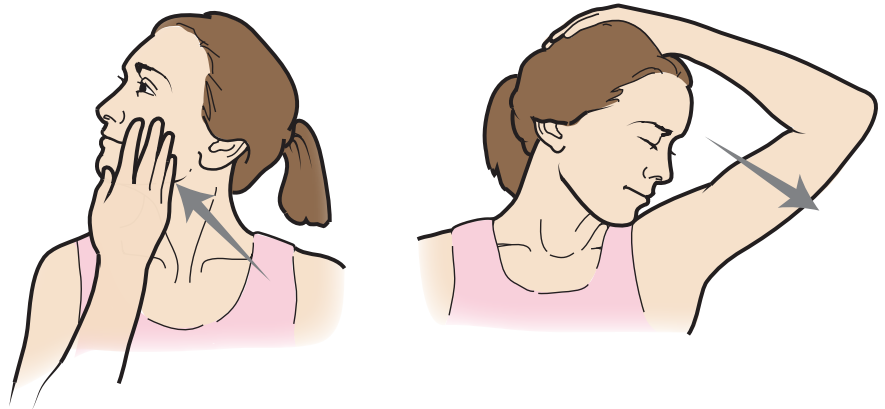


Figure 1. Turning neck stretch

Chin tuck

1. Sit or stand with your back and head leaning against the wall for good posture.
2. Tuck your chin in and try to flatten the back of your neck against the wall (see Figure 2).
3. Return to the starting position.
4. Repeat 10 times.

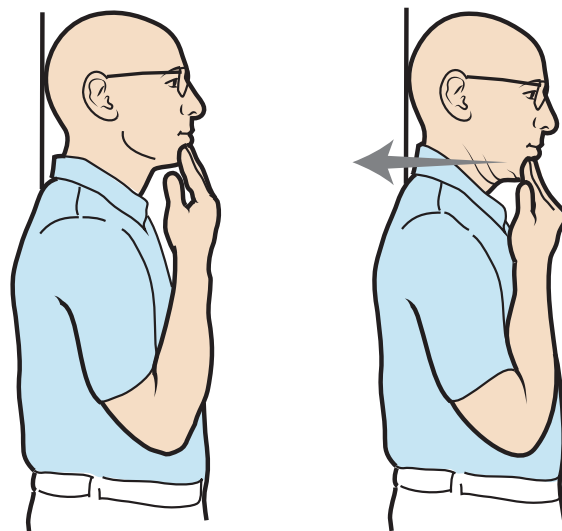


Figure 2. Chin tuck

Side neck stretch

1. Sit or stand and point your right arm downward.
2. Place your left arm on the top of your head.
3. Gently pull down your head to the left, to stretch the muscles on the right side of your neck (see Figure 3).
4. Hold for 30 seconds then release.
5. Repeat 5 times.
6. Repeat on the other side of your neck.

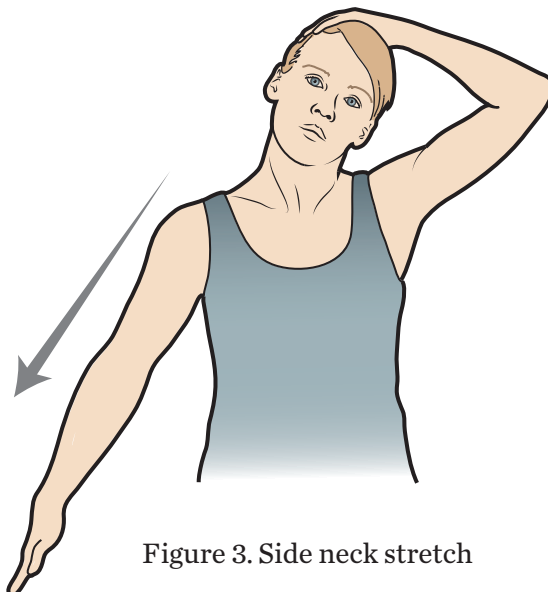


Figure 3. Side neck stretch

Shoulder shrugs

1. Shrug your shoulders up toward your ears (see Figure 4).
2. Drop them down.
3. Repeat 10 times.

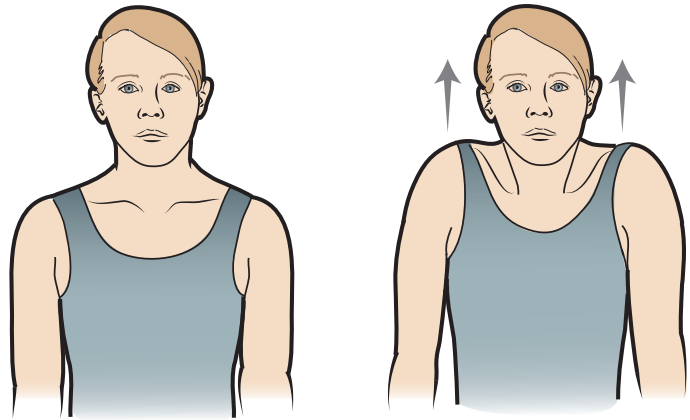


Figure 4. Shoulder shrugs

Arm circles

1. Sit or stand with your arms at your side, with your palms facing forward and your thumbs pointing to the ceiling.
2. Lift your arms up and circle them backwards (see Figure 5).
3. Return to starting position.
4. Repeat 10 times.

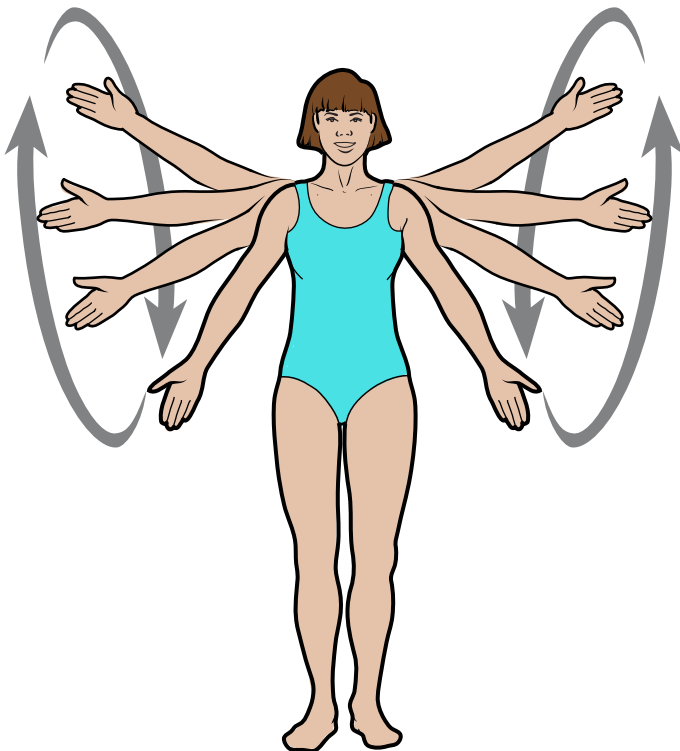


Figure 5. Arm circles

Arm and shoulder retraction

1. Sit or stand with your arms in front of you and your thumbs up.
2. Move your arms out to the sides, while squeezing your shoulder blades together (see Figure 6).
3. Return to starting position.
4. Repeat 10 times.

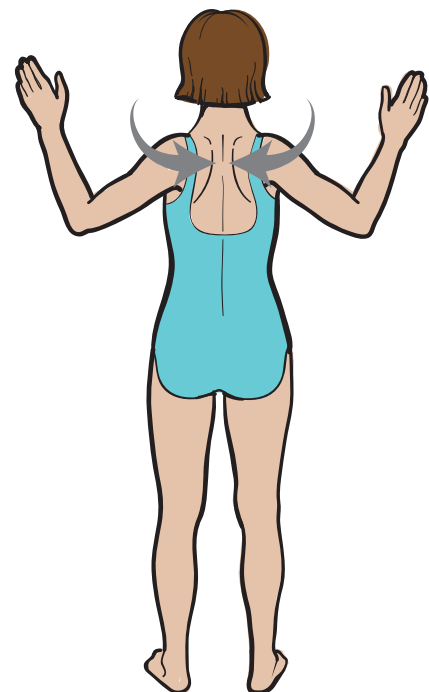


Figure 6. Arm and shoulder retraction

Pectoral stretch using doorway

1. Stand in a doorway.
2. Place your hands and forearms at shoulder level on the sides of the doorway (see Figure 7).
3. Gently step forward until you feel a gentle stretch across your chest and in front of your shoulders. Keep your back straight and your neck and shoulders relaxed.
4. Hold for 30 seconds.
5. Return to starting position.
6. Repeat 5 times.

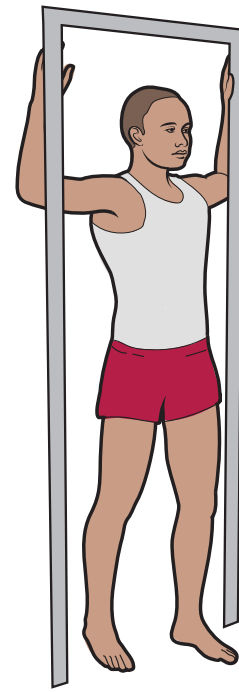


Figure 7. Pectoral stretch using doorway

Jaw lowering

1. Sit or stand by a mirror so that you can see your face.
2. Place the tip of your tongue behind your top teeth.
3. Slowly lower your bottom jaw to open your mouth, while keeping your tongue in contact with the roof of your mouth (see Figure 8). Use the mirror to make sure that you are opening your mouth evenly, and not moving your jaw from side to side.
4. Close your mouth.
5. Repeat 10 times.



Figure 8. Jaw lowering

Diaphragmatic breathing

1. Lie on your back or sit in a supportive chair.
2. Place one of both of your hands over your abdomen (belly, see Figure 9).
3. Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose. Your abdomen should rise but your upper chest should remain still and relaxed.
4. Breathe out slowly through your mouth. As you breathe out, slowly and gently pull your abdomen towards your spine.
5. Repeat 10 times.

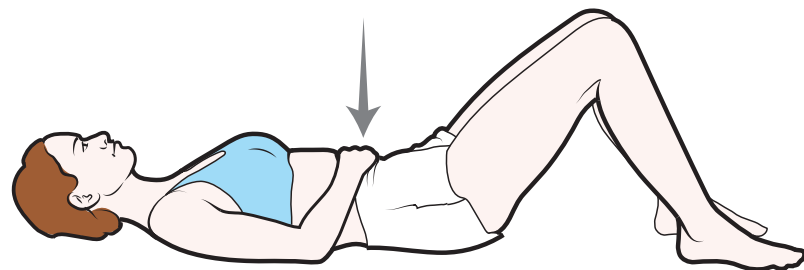


Figure 9. Diaphragmatic breathing